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SUBJECT: NINEWA: SCIRI REP BLAMES SUNNIS, USG FOR PROBLEMS WITH
GOVERNMENT FORMATION

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CLASSIFIED BY: Cameron Munter, PRT Leader, Provincial
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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) SCIRI provincial spokesman Aref Yousef believes delays in the formation of a new central government are the fault of Sunni Arab political parties and the USG. Yousef says Sunni coalitions Tawafog Iraqi Front (Iraqi Accord Front) and Iraqi Front for National Dialogue (Al Hewan Iraqi Front) are responsible for not compromising on government formation and for inciting violence throughout the country. Statements by the USG in Iraq are also contributing to tensions, claims Yousef. He fingered U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Khalilzad of "choosing" the side of Sunni Arabs in government talks. Yousef requests that the USG be more neutral in its dealings with all political parties and ethnicities in the country. Regarding militias, Yousef admits Badr Brigades has a presence in Ninewa but denies they are operating as a militia here. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PRT PolOff met with Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) provincial spokesman Aref Yousef in Mosul on April 9.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND SUNNI LETDOWN

¶3. (C) SCIRI provincial spokesman Yousef claimed that the Iraqi people were hungry for government stability, but that Sunni Arab political parties and the USG hindered its formation. He said the Iraqi people, especially the Shia community, were "let down" after high expectations coming out of last December's national election. As a result security has crumbled, talks have been stalled, and the situation would continue to worsen every day if there was no government. Yousef recommended that problems be handled through the political process and not by armed conflict between Sunnis and Shia. Tawafog Iraqi Front coalition (led by the Iraqi Islamic Party "IIP") and the predominantly Sunni-Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC) were the biggest perpetrators of terrorism, claimed Yousef. The USG could help fix the problem by asking more secular and neutral leaders from the Sunni Arab community -- such as Vice President Sheikh Ghazi Al

Yawar and Mithal Al-Aloosi of the Iraqi Nation (Al-Umma) Party -- to help negotiate the new government's formation instead. Both Al-Aloosi and Al Yawar could be relied upon to help build consensus and "eliminate" terrorist elements of the two larger Sunni Arab parties, he said. When asked whether the situation would cool down if Prime Minister Ibrahim Al Ja'afari stepped aside, Yousef disagreed. The problem was much larger than Ja'afari, he claimed. Rather, Iraqis would accept any leadership as long as the government was formed.

USG ALSO AT FAULT FOR LACK OF NEW GOVERNMENT

14. (C) Yousef claimed public statements by U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Khalilzad have hindered efforts to form the new government. "His outlook should be impartial," said Yousef of the Ambassador. Instead, claimed Yousef, Khalilzad appeared to be "favoring" Sunni Arab political parties over others, especially the Shia. And as a result the Shia were demonstrating against the USG. When pressed for more specifics Yousef said it was not necessarily Khalilzad's statements that Prime Minister Ibrahim Al Ja'afari should step down. Rather, it was how Khalilzad "attacked" the Ministry of Interior (MOI), saying that the country could be heading down the path of civil war, claimed Yousef. He said he could not understand why Khalilzad would support Sunni Arabs in the political process when they originally "objected" to the democratic process in Iraq and were responsible for "encouraging terror."

NO SHIA MILITIAS IN NINEWA

15. (C) Yousef said he could not speak about whether there were Shia militias causing problems in southern Iraq. However, he did claim that Badr Brigade members were residing in Bartalla in eastern Ninewa. He said Badr forces came to Ninewa in the 1980s

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during the Iran-Iraq War, and comprised of Shia, Sunni, Yezidis, and Christians. By 1988, the Badr were only sporadically engaged in fights with Saddam Hussein's forces, he said. Today, the approximately 50 remaining Badr members were "without weapons" and had successfully transitioned to a social assistance organization. The "new" Badr Brigade held education and religious courses for women and sports leagues for youth, he claimed. Yousef deflected questions about allegations of MOI death squads and the Mahdi Militia. He implicated Sunni Arabs with security problems in the country instead. Problems in Mosul with kidnappings, threats, and assassinations were caused by Sunni Arab aggression, he claimed. Shia could no longer live safely in the city, said Yousef, and that was why SCIRI moved its headquarters out of Mosul late last year.

COMMENT

16. (C) Iraq's largest political party, SCIRI is a tiny minority in Ninewa, with most of its support coming from Shia Turkoman in Tal Afar in the west and Shia Shabek in Al Hamdaniya and Bashiqa districts in the east. We noticed a change in Yousef's attitude towards Sunnis, especially with regards to the two largest Sunni Arab political parties, IIP and INDC, which he blames for stalling new government formation talks in Baghdad. After the December election Yousef was very encouraged and spoke about reaching out to all groups, especially Sunni Arabs in Ninewa. Now that has changed, which is not a good sign for Shia-Sunni harmony in Ninewa.
MUNTER